

THE MONSTER

The Tragedy of a Woman Who Tried to Cheat Nature

His story has not been offered as a preachment against birth control. The purpose of putting it before you has been to show that to defy Nature is to incur her wrath. The natural law was not made to be broken, and cannot be broken with impunity. To those who disregard it comes retribution in full measure, while those who heed its decree find happiness and contentment—joys not of riches but of the patter of little feet.

John was a certified public accountant in West Philadelphia, a bookkeeper who knew how to dream. As he was beginning to make a great financial success, he met and wooed the beautiful Myrtle Stanley. He married Myrtle, and on his wedding night, in the bridal suite at the Copley Plaza Hotel, in Boston, he confessed to her his hope that they would have children. Myrtle did not want to have children in the early years of her married life, because she wanted to have her husband all to herself. John became a very wealthy stock broker. They seemed ideally happy, but no children came to bless their union. Then one day John learned that Dr. Sinclair, a family friend, was being pursued by the police because a woman patient had died in his office. He discovered that one of the frequent patients of the doctor's criminal practice was Myrtle. Going home, he accused Myrtle, who admitted to him that she had been forced to have an operation performed which would permanently bar her from motherhood. At his demand for a divorce, she merely laughed at him, and reminded him that he was hers until death did them part. "Then," he shouted, "death shall part us now." For a moment there was murder in his heart, but reason intervened and stayed his hand. He then told her that a divorce was the sole course open, but Myrtle only laughed at him, saying that she was Mrs. John Hartley, and intended to remain so. After careful deliberation, John left her and went to a quiet little apartment on Cathedral Parkway. There he met Violet. She had tasted the bitter dregs of betrayal and blighted motherhood and, like John, felt the impulse to end it all. Days grew into months, and these two bits of driftwood became close companions, each tempting the other back to life and a rebirth of hope. No words or looks or anything but friendly admiration passed between them. She confessed one day that she wants him to be the father of her child, and they realize that they are in love with each other.

While I made very little change in the outward appearances of my mode of living, within everything was changed.

Violet loved me. I loved Violet. That great fact was sufficient to complete in our lives an entire transformation; to erase from my memory all bitterness and despair and to release from my mind the paralysis which had been exerted by the tragedy of the past. I was able to see that my whole courtship and marriage of Myrtle was a mistake; that I had probably made her quite as unhappy as she had made me; that we never were suited one for the other. In a very real and practical sense, I began to regret the harshness of my attitude toward Myrtle. Perhaps I had mismanaged the whole situation. Now that I had really found my true love, I looked upon the whole world with kindly and pleasant eyes.

I took a fresh and earnest interest in my work, I went to it singing. I surprised old friends by greeting them and chatting with them on the streets and at the club. Their lifted eyebrows and general air of mild surprise neither troubled nor surprised me. I had done everything that I could to antagonize them. I fully understood their attitude, but I meant to win back the old friendships that I valued, and live a new life henceforth.

While my plans were still a bit indefinite they were beginning to take tangible form. My first interest, of course, had been to dissuade Violet from going abroad. We thought over various means, and had about decided that I

should go to Reno and live for six months in order to obtain the divorce which Myrtle denied me in the New York courts. But I realized that there were practical difficulties in the way of this. Myrtle would not give me up without a struggle, because as my wife she could claim much more from me than as a divorcee. And the prestige of my name was a social asset that she would not willingly relinquish. In fact, I had once threatened to go to Reno during a quarrel with Myrtle, and she had venomously promised me that she would follow me there and live there and contest the suit. This would make the issue of the case extremely doubtful. As I was allowing her an enormous income, she would thus be able to use my own money against me in my effort to find peace and happiness.

But I was determined to be free. Somehow and some way I would find a legitimate means of escape from the shackles of that unfortunate marriage, to lift its incubus from my shoulders, and make me able to marry the woman I really wanted. I meant to marry Violet in spite of every obstacle, but I knew that I would have to proceed with the greatest caution.

And meanwhile we went on living in adjacent apartments, keeping our nightly tryst across the fire escape, going to occasional theaters, lectures, concerts, but having now added to the joys of companionship, the full hearted intimacy that comes of a love matured, perfected, and utterly fulfilled.

I had begun to believe that I was going to be happy for ever and ever.

It could not have been more than six weeks after that wonderful night when Violet and I had come to a complete understanding, when I came home early from the office, intending to surprise her. I meant to take her out to dinner, and then to a performance of a new comedy which had recently opened on Broadway most propitiously, and for which I had managed to obtain two good seats.

Whistling, I let myself into the apartment, and almost instantly I observed a note in Violet's handwriting lying on the table—the

evidences of what you are, I can only pity you. I have not the power left to pity myself. You monster! VIOLET WINTER.

Even then the abominable truth was not clear to me. Even then I did not appreciate the utterly foul and loathsome lie which Myrtle had played as her last trump card in her game to hold me against my will. All that I knew, all that mattered, was that Violet was gone. Violet, who had loved me, had fled. Violet, who had nestled in my arms and pledged eternity between kisses, was gone from me, hating and despising me.

And for this, somehow, my wife was responsible.



The same maid who had attended her when we had lived together answered my ring.

same table beside which she had been sitting when I first beheld her.

I read that note as a man who reads his own sentence of death. John Hartley:—

Your wife has been here. I have talked with her. Surely this is explanation enough for you—if you want an explanation—of why I have run off and hidden myself. Yet, even in the bitter disillusion which has come from meeting this unfortunate woman, I cannot bring myself to curse you as you deserve to be cursed. I wanted your love because I loved you. But now, having seen with my own eyes the

Out in the hall I rushed, and ran down the stairs into the street. Calling a cab, I told the driver to take me as fast as he could to a number in Park Avenue which I had almost been able to forget. On that journey I came to a murderous decision. If it cost Myrtle's life and mine, I was ready to have a final reckoning with her. I would choke the truth from her, if necessary. I would end once and for all, with violence perhaps, even with murder, the issues that lay between us.

The same maid who had attended her when we lived together responded to my ring. I brushed

past her and hurried down the hallway.

"Where are you?" I shouted. I heard a kind of wheezy exclamation, the sound of a slowly dragged foot shuffling across the floor, and then a sharp click as a key was turned in a lock.

Then I knew. Myrtle was in her boudoir and had locked the door.

With an oath I started down the narrow corridor until I stood beating with both fists upon the narrow panels and crying:—

"Open this door, Myrtle. You cannot lock yourself away from me."

I heard a hoarse clearing of the throat and a cough that was like a man's—

"Is that you, Johnny?" demanded a voice. It was such a voice as I had never heard come from a woman in all my life before. That its froglike croaking, its utterly unmusical harshness, could be Myrtle's voice, was incredible—Myrtle, whose soft and tender words had been dear to my boyish ears as the rippling rush of cool, sweet springs. This was a growl, a coarse, animal sound, like the throaty bellow of some bloated old sea captain who has had too much to drink.

I shuddered at the ghastly sound.

"Open the door," I thundered.

"Now, Johnny," croaked the voice, "don't you come around here trying to start any trouble with me. I am sick, and I cannot stand any excitement. The doctors say it is not good for me. So go on away, Johnny; go on away."

"I won't go away," I replied, "not until I have wrung the truth out of you."

I heard her laugh, and a chill ran through my bones. It was such a deep, rumbling giggle, like the derision of a damned soul.

"I guess you have heard some news from your lady friend," she sniggered. "You can thank me for that, Johnny."

"What did you dare to tell her?" I cried.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha ha! Would you really like to know, Johnny. Would you, really, now? Thought you could put something over, didn't you? Well, I will tell you what I told her. I told her to look at me. I am not very pretty to look at, Johnny, these days. And I told her that you were to blame for what I looked like. I told her you ought to be shot dead as a piece of carrion, Johnny. I told her you were a menace to the public health, Johnny."

"I told her you were an incredible monster, Johnny. I guess that was enough for any woman, after she had a good look at me. I blamed it all on you, Johnny. She did not want to get to look like me, you know."

I had heard enough.

Myrtle, the girl of those early dreams; Myrtle, his wife, this monster! His reason tottered.

MAY AND JUNE—

Seeing the Town

By H. A. MacGill

